

THOMAS, RHYS (1720? - 1790), printer

Name: Rhys Thomas
Date of birth: 1720?
Date of death: 1790
Gender: Male
Occupation: printer
Area of activity: Printing and Publishing
Author: William Llewelyn Davies

Printer at Carmarthen, Llandoverly, and Cowbridge. Rhys Thomas is included in this work as being one of the best Welsh printers of the 18th century, and because of the connection of his press (at Cowbridge) with the publication of the *English-Welsh dictionary* of **John Walters**. He was established at Carmarthen in 1760; two small books of hymns by **Morgan Rhys** (*Cascljad o Hymnau*) and Dafydd William, Llandeilo-fach (*Golwg y Ffyddlonjaid ar Degwch a Gogoniant Iesu Grist*) belong to that year. He collaborated with **John Ross**, another Carmarthen printer, for a time in 1763. From 1764 until 1771 he had a press at Llandoverly; there he was assisted by his brother DANIEL THOMAS. It would appear that Daniel Thomas continued to print at Llandoverly until 1773; note, however, that the imprint on *Dissertation on the Welsh Language*, by **John Walters**, printed at Cowbridge in 1771, bears the name of R. and D. Thomas. At the end of 1769 or the beginning of 1770 Rhys Thomas set up a press at Cowbridge. It has been suggested that he was urged to do so by the lexicographer **John Walters**, who lived at Llandough nearby. Whether that was so or not, the connection between the two men was to last for about twenty years. The dictionary, which was issued in parts, did not fare too well, in regard to expedition, at the hand of Rhys Thomas. Part i appeared in 1770 but part xiv was not issued until 1783. In the meantime the author had to exercise considerable patience and, eventually, to suffer severe disappointment; as **Ifano Jones** shows (*Hist. of Printing and Printers in Wales*) the remaining portion did not appear until 1794, and then from London, **John Walters** having secured the help of **Owen Jones** (Owain Myfyr) to bring this about.

Rhys Thomas had died four years previously; he was buried at Llandough on 11 July 1790. He was followed at Cowbridge by HENRY WALTERS (1766 - 1829), third son of the lexicographer. Walters printed but little, and on 6 February 1791, sold the press and the type to JOHN BIRD (died 1840), Cardiff. Other members of the Bird family were concerned in the Cardiff printing business begun by John Bird; it was Hugh Bird who disposed of it, in 1866, to **William Lewis** (died 1918), the founder of the firm which prints this biographical dictionary.

Author

Sir William Llewelyn Davies, (1887 - 1952)

Sources

Ifano Jones, *A history of printing and printers in Wales to 1810, and of successive and related printers to 1923* (Cardiff 1925)

T. C. Evans ('Cadrawd'), 'John Walters and the First Printing Press in Glamorganshire' in *Journal of the Welsh Bibliographical Society*, Vol.I, No 3, 83-9

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